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Playboy Interview with The Beatles:
A candid conversation with England's mop-topped millionaire minstrels
Interviewed by Jean Shepherd
February 1965 issue
Article ©1965 Playboy Press

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PLAYBOY: "OK, we're on. Why don't we begin by..."

PAUL: *We'd be idiots to say it isn't a constant inspiration to be making a lot of money. It is to anyone. Why do business tycoons stay tycoons?*

JOHN: "Doing Hamlet."

(laughter)

RINGO: "Yeah, yeah, let's do that."

PLAYBOY: "That sounds fun, but just for laughs, why don't we do an interview instead?"

GEORGE: "Say, that's a fine idea. I wish I'd thought of that."

PAUL: "What shall we ask you for a first question?"

RINGO: "About those Bunny girls..."

PLAYBOY: "No comment. Let's start over. Ringo, you're the last Beatle to join the group, aren't you?"

RINGO: "Yes."

JOHN: "A few years probably... sort of off and on, really... for three years or so."

PAUL: "Yeah, but really amateur."

GEORGE: "The local pub, you know. And in each other's uncle's houses."

JOHN: "And at George's brother's wedding. Things like that. Ringo used to fill in sometimes if our drummer was ill. With his periodic illness."

RINGO: "He took little pills to make him ill."

PLAYBOY: "When you joined the others Ringo, they weren't quite as big as they are now, were they?"

RINGO: "They were the biggest thing in Liverpool. In them days that was big enough."

PAUL: "This is a point we've made before. Some people say a man is made of muscle and blood... No they don't... they say, 'How come you've suddenly been able to adjust to fame,' you know, to nationwide fame and things. It all started quite nicely with us, you see, in our own sphere where we used to play, in Liverpool. We never used to play outside it, except when we went to Hamburg. Just those two circles. And in each of them, I think we were 'round the highest paid, and probably at the time the most popular. So in actual fact we had the same feeling of being famous then as we do now."

GEORGE: "We were recognized then, too, only people didn't chase us about."

PAUL: "But it just grew. The quantity grew; not the quality of the feeling."

PLAYBOY: "When did you know that you had really hit it big? There must have been one night when you knew it really had begun."

JOHN: "Well, we'd been playing 'round in Liverpool for a bit without getting anywhere, trying to get work, and the other groups kept telling us, 'You'll do alright, you'll get work someday.' And then we went back to Hamburg, and when we came back, suddenly we were a 'Wow.' Mind you, 70 percent of the audience thought we were a 'German Wow,' but we didn't care about that."

PAUL: "We were billed in the paper: 'From Hamburg-- The Beatles.'"

JOHN: "In Liverpool, people didn't even know we were from Liverpool. They thought we were from Hamburg. They said, 'Christ, they speak good English!' Which we did, of course, being English. But that's when we first, you know, stood there being cheered for the first time."

PAUL: "That was when we felt we were..."

JOHN: "...on the way up."

PAUL: "...gonna make it in Liverpool."

PLAYBOY: "How much were you earning then?"

JOHN: "For that particular night, 20 dollars."

PLAYBOY: "Apiece?"

JOHN: "For the group! Hell, we used to work for less than that."

PAUL: "We used to work for about three or four dollars a night."

RINGO: "Plus all the Coke we could drink. And we drank alot."

PLAYBOY: "Do you remember the first journalist who came to see you and said, 'I want to write about you'?"

RINGO "We went 'round to them at first, didn't we?"

JOHN: "We went and said, 'We're a group and we've got this record out. Will you...'"

GEORGE: "And the door would slam."

PLAYBOY: "We've heard it said that when you first went to America you were doubtful that you'd make it over there."

JOHN: "That's true. We didn't think we were going to make it at all. It was only Brian telling us we were gonna make it. Brian Epstein our manager, and George Harrison."

GEORGE: "I knew we had a good chance... because of the record sales over there."

JOHN: "The thing is, in America it just seemed ridiculous... I mean, the idea of having a hit record over there. It was just, you know, something you could never do. That's what I thought anyhow. But then I realized that it's just the same as here, that kids everywhere all go for the same stuff. And seeing we'd done it in England and all, there's no reason why we couldn't do it in America, too. But the American disc jockeys didn't know about British records; they didn't play them; nobody promoted them, and so you didn't have hits."

GEORGE: "Well, there were one or two doing it as a novelty."

JOHN: "But it wasn't until 'Time' and "Life' and "Newsweek' came over and wrote articles and created an interest in us that American disc jockeys started playing our records. And Capitol said, 'Well, can we have their records?' You know, they had been

offered our records years ago, and they didn't want them. But when they heard we were big over here they said, 'Can we have 'em now?' So we said, 'As long as you promote them.' So Capitol promoted, and with them and all these articles on us, the records just took off."

PLAYBOY: "There's been some dispute among your fans and critics, about whether you're primarily entertainers or musicians... or perhaps neither. What's your own opinion?"

JOHN: "We're money-makers first; then we're entertainers."

RINGO: "No, we're not."

JOHN: "What are we, then?"

RINGO: "Dunno. Entertainers first."

JOHN: "OK."

RINGO: "'Cuz we were entertainers before we were money-makers."

JOHN: "That's right, of course. It's just that the press drivels it into you, so you say it 'cuz they like to hear it, you know."

PAUL: "Still, we'd be idiots to say that it isn't a constant inspiration to be making alot of money. It always is, to anyone. I mean, why do big business tycoons stay big business tycoons? It's not because they're inspired at the greatness of big business; they're in it because they're making alot of money at it. We'd be idiots if we pretended we were in it solely for kicks. In the beginning we were, but at the same time we were hoping to make a bit of cash. it's a switch around now, though, from what it used to be. We used to be doing it mainly for kicks and not making alot of money, and now we're making alot of money without too many kicks... except that we happen to like the money we're making. But we still enjoy making records, going on-stage, making films, and all that business."

JOHN: "We love every minute of it, Beatle people!"

PLAYBOY: "As hard-bitten refugees from the Liverpool slums-- according to heart-rending fan magazine biographies-- do you feel prepared to cope with all this sudden wealth?"

PAUL: "We've managed to make the adjustment. Contrary to rumor, you see, none of us was brought up in any slums or in great degrees of poverty. We've always had enough; we've never been starving."

JOHN: "Yeah, we saw those articles in the American fan mags that said, 'Those boys struggled up from the slums..."

GEORGE: "We never starved. Even Ringo hasn't."

RINGO: "Even I."

PLAYBOY: "What kind of families do you come from?"

GEORGE: "Well, you know, not rich. Just workin' class. They've got jobs... just work."

PLAYBOY: "What does your father do?"

GEORGE: "Well, he doesn't do anything now. He used to be a bus driver..."

JOHN: "In the Merchant Navy."

PLAYBOY: "Do you have any brothers or sisters, George?"

GEORGE: "I've got two brothers."

JOHN: "And no sisters to speak of."

PLAYBOY: "How about you, Paul?"

PAUL: "I've got one brother, and a father who used to be a cotton salesman down in New Orleans, you know. That's probably why I look a bit tanned... But seriously folks.... he occasionally had trouble paying the bills, but it was never, you know, never 'Go out and pick blackberries, son; we're a bit short this week.'"

PLAYBOY: "How about you, John?"

JOHN: "Oh, just the same. I used to have an auntie. And I had a dad whom I couldn't quite find."

RINGO: "John lived with the Mounties."

JOHN: "Yeah, the Mounties. They fed me well. No starvation."

PLAYBOY: "How about your family, Ringo, old man?"

RINGO: "Just workin' class. I was brought up with my mother and me grandparents. And then she married me stepfather when I was 13. All the time she was working. I never starved. I used to get most things."

GEORGE: "Never starved?"

RINGO: *We used to get in the car, and I'd look over at John and say, "Christ, you're a bloody phenomenon!" and laugh—'cause it was only him.*

RINGO: "No. I never starved. She always fed me. I was an only child, so it wasn't amazing."

PLAYBOY: "It's quite fashionable in some circles in America to hate your parents. But none of you seem to."

RINGO: "We're probably just as against the things our parents liked or stood for as they are in America. But we don't hate our parents for it."

PLAYBOY: "It's often exactly the opposite in America."

PAUL: "Well, you know, alot of Americans are unbalanced. I don't care what you say. No, really. Alot of them are quite normal, of course, but we've met many unbalanced ones. You know the type of person, like the political Whig."

PLAYBOY: "How do you mean?"

PAUL: "You know... the professional politcal type; in authority sort of thing. Some of them are just mad! And I've met some really maniac American girls! Like this one girl who walked up to me in a press conference and said, 'I'm Lily.' I said, 'Hello, how do you do?' and she said, 'Doesn't my name mean anything to you?' I said, 'Ah, no...' and I thought, 'Oh god, it's one of these people that you've met and you should know.' And so Derek, our press agant, who happened to be there at the time, hanging over my shoulder, giving me quotes, which happens at every press conference..."

GEORGE: "You'd better not say that."

PAUL: "Oh yes, that's not true, Beatle people! But he was sort of hanging about, and he said, 'Well did you ring, or did you write, or something?' And she said, 'No.' And he said, 'Well, how did you get in touch with Paul? How do you know him?' And she said, 'Through God.' Well, there was sort of a ghastly silence. I mean, we both sort of gulped and blushed. I said, 'Well, that's very nice, Lily. Thanks very much. I must be off now.'"

PLAYBOY: "There wasn't a big lightening bolt from the sky?"

PAUL: "No, there wasn't. But I talked to her afterward, and she said she'd got a vision from God, and God had said to her..."

JOHN: "It's been a hard day's night."

(laughter)

PAUL: "No, God had said, 'Listen Lil, Paul is waiting for you; he's in love with you and he wants to marry you, so go down and meet him, and he'll know you right away. It's very funny, you know. I was trying to persuade her that she didn't in actual fact have a vision from God, that it was..."

GEORGE: "It was probably somebody disguised as God."

PAUL: "You wouldn't hardly ever meet somebody like that in England, but there seemed to be alot like her in America."

JOHN: "Well, there's alot of people in America, so you've got a much bigger group to get nutters from."

PLAYBOY: "Speaking of nutters, do you ever wake up in the morning, look in the mirror and say, 'My god, I'm a Beatle?'"

PAUL: "No, not quite."

(laughter)

JOHN: "Actually, we only do it in each other's company. I know I never do it alone."

RINGO: "We used to do it more. We'd get in the car. I'd look over at John and say, 'Christ, look at you; you're a bloody phenomenon!' and just laugh... 'cuz it was only him, you know. And a few old friends of ours done it, from Liverpool. I'd catch 'em looking at me, and I'd say, 'What's the matter with you?' It's just daft, them just screaming and laughing, thinking I'm one of them people."

PLAYBOY: "A Beatle?"

RINGO: "Yes."

PAUL: "The thing that makes me know we've made it is like tonight, when we slipped into a sweetshop. In the old days we could have just walked into a sweetshop and nobody would have noticed us. We would have just got our sweets and gone out. But tonight we just walked in... it took a couple of seconds... and the people there just dropped their sweets. Before, you see, there would have been no reaction at all. Except possibly, 'Look at that fellow with the long hair. Doesn't he look daft?' But nowadays they're just amazed; they can't believe it. But actually we're no different."

PLAYBOY: "The problem is that you don't seem to be like real people. You're Beatles."

PAUL: "I know. It's funny, that."

GEORGE: "It's all the publicity."

PAUL: "We're taken in by it too. Because we react exactly the same way to the stars we meet. When we meet people we've seen on the telly or in films, we still think, 'Wow!'"

JOHN: "It's a good thing, because we get just as tickled."

PAUL: "The thing is that people, when they see you on TV and in magazines and up in a film, and hear you on the radio, they never expect to meet you, you know, even our fans. Their wish is to meet you, but in the back of their mind they never think they're actually gonna meet us. And so, when they do meet us, they just don't believe it."

PLAYBOY: "Where do they find you-- hiding in your hotel rooms?"

JOHN: "No, on the street usually."

PLAYBOY: "You mean you're brave enough to venture out into the streets without a bodyguard?"

RINGO: "Sure."

GEORGE: "We're always on the street. Staggering about."

RINGO: "Flogging our bodies."

GEORGE: "You catch John sleeping in the gutter occasionally."

PLAYBOY: "When people see you in the street, do you ever have any action?"

GEORGE: "Well, not really, because when you're walking about, you don't bump into groups of people as a rule. People don't walk 'round in gangs, as a rule."

PLAYBOY: "Can you even go out shopping without getting mobbed by them, individually or collectively?"

JOHN: "We avoid that."

PAUL: "The mountain comes to Mohammed."

GEORGE: "The shop comes to us, as he says. But sometimes we just roll into a store and buy stuff and leg out again."

PLAYBOY: "Isn't that like looking for trouble?"

PAUL: "No, we walk four times faster than the average person."

PLAYBOY: "Can you eat safely in restaurants?"

GEORGE: "Sure we can. I was there the other night."

JOHN: "Where?"

GEORGE: "Restaurants."

PAUL: "Of course we're known in the restaurants we go in."

GEORGE: "And usually it's only Americans that'll bother you."

PLAYBOY: "Really?"

GEORGE: "Really. If we go into a restaurant in London, there's always going to be a couple of them eating there; you just tell the waiter to hold them off if they try to come over. If they come over anyway you just sign."

RINGO: "But you know, the restaurants I go to, probably if I wasn't famous I wouldn't go to them. Even if I had the same money and wasn't famous I wouldn't go to them, because the people that go to them are drags. The good thing when you go to a place where the people are such drags, such snobs, you see, is that they won't bother to come over to your table. They pretend they don't even know who you are, and you get away with an easy night."

GEORGE: "And they think they are laughing at us, but really we're laughing at them... 'cuz we know they know who we are."

RINGO: "How's that?"

GEORGE: "They're not going to be like the rest and ask for autographs."

RINGO: "And if they do, we just swear at them."

GEORGE: "Well, I don't, Beatle people. I sign the autograph and thank them profusely for coming over, and offer them a piece of my chop."

JOHN: "If we're in the middle of a meal, I usually say, 'Do you mind waiting till I'm finished?'"

GEORGE: "And then we keep eating until they give up and leave."

JOHN: "That's not true, Beatle people!"

PLAYBOY: "Apart from these occupational hazards, are you happy in your work? Do you really enjoy getting pelted by jellybeans and being drowned out by thousands of screaming subteenagers?"

RINGO: "Yes."

GEORGE: "We still find it exciting."

JOHN: "Well, you know..."

PAUL: "After a while, actually, you begin to get used to it, you know."

PLAYBOY: "Can you really get used to this?"

PAUL: "Well, you still get excited when you go onto a stage and the audience is great, you know. But obviously you're not as excited as you were when you first heard that one of your records had reached number one. I mean, you really do go wild with excitement then; you go out drinking and celebrating and things."

RINGO: "Now we just go out drinkin' anyway."

PLAYBOY: "Do you stick pretty much together off-stage?"

JOHN: "Well, yes and no. Groups like this are normally not friends, you know. They're just four people out there thrown together to make an act. There may be two of them who sort of go off and are friends, you know, but..."

GEORGE: "Just what do you mean by that?"

JOHN: "Strictly platonic, of course. But we're all rather good friends, as it happens."

PLAYBOY: "Then do you see a good deal of one another when you're not working?"

PAUL: "Well, you know, it depends. We needn't always go to the same places together. In earlier days, of course, when we didn't know London, and we didn't know anybody in London, then we really did stick together, and it would really be just like four fellows down from the north for a coach trip. But nowadays, you know, we've got our own girlfriends... they're in London... so that we each normally go out with our girlfriends on our days off. Except for John, of course, who's married."

PLAYBOY: "Do any of the rest of you have any plans to settle down?"

PAUL: "I haven't got any."

GEORGE: "Ringo and I are getting married."

RINGO: "Oh? To whom?"

GEORGE: "To each other. But that's a thing you'd better keep a secret."

RINGO: "You better not tell anybody."

GEORGE: I mean, if we said something like that, people'd probably think we're queers. After all, that's not the sort of thing you can put in a reputable magazine like PLAYBOY. And anyway, we don't want to start the rumor going."

PLAYBOY: "We'd better change the subject, then. Do you remember the other night when this girl came backstage..."

GEORGE: "Naked..."

PLAYBOY: "Unfortunately not. And she said..."

GEORGE: "It's been a hard day's night."

PLAYBOY: "No. She pointed at you, George, and said, 'There's a Beatle!' And you others said, 'That's George.' And she said, 'No, it's a Beatle!'

JOHN: "And you said, 'This way to the bedroom.'"

PLAYBOY: "No, it was, 'Would you like us to introduce you to him?'"

JOHN: "I like my line better."

PLAYBOY: "Well, the point is that she didn't believe that there was such a thing as an actual Beatle 'person.'"

JOHN: "She's right, you know."

PLAYBOY: "Do you run across many like her?"

GEORGE: "Is there any other kind?"

PLAYBOY: "In America, too?"

RINGO: "Everywhere."

PLAYBOY: "With no exceptions?"

JOHN: "In America, you mean?

PLAYBOY: "Yes."

JOHN: "A few."

PAUL: "Yeah, Some of those American girls have been great."

JOHN: "Like Joan Baez."

PAUL: "Joan Baez is good, yeah, very good."

JOHN: "She's the only one I like."

GEORGE: "And Jayne Mansfield. PLAYBOY made her."

PAUL: "She's a bit different, isn't she? Different."

RINGO: "She's soft."

GEORGE: "Soft and warm."

PAUL: "Actually, she's a clot."

RINGO: "...says Paul, the god of the Beatles."

PAUL: "I didn't mean it, Beatle People! Actually, I haven't even met her. But you won't print that anyway, of course, because PLAYBOY is very pro-Mansfield. They think she's a rave. But she really is an old bag."

(continued)

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